

# A Healthy Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a thrilling and special part of your life. But it can also be a little scary. If this is your first baby, you might have questions about what to do and what not to do. *What do I need to eat? Will I be tired all the time? Will I have stretch marks?* These questions are normal, but try to be patient and enjoy this journey one step at a time! You will learn as you go that there are simple things you can do to keep both you and your baby happy and healthy.

## One half of all pregnancies are not planned!

And women often don't realize that they are pregnant during the first couple weeks. These are good reasons why you should always take care of your health—your baby is counting on you for the best start at life!

## Before Pregnancy

If you are thinking about getting pregnant, or you are able to get pregnant, there are steps you can take to take care of your health. Here's what you can do.

- Get 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid daily from foods fortified with folic acid or a vitamin or folic acid pill before you get pregnant and in the first three

months while you're pregnant. Folic acid (or folate) can help keep your baby from having birth defects. If you don't get enough folic acid, your baby's spine may not form right. This is called spina bifida (spy-nuh bif-uh-duh). Also, without enough folic acid, your baby's brain may not form or may only partly form. This is called anencephaly (an-en-seffeelee). Many doctors will prescribe a vitamin for you that has folic acid. But you also can buy vitamins or folic acid pills at the drug store or grocery store. Taking folic acid in a pill is the best way to know you are getting enough. You could get your folic acid though food alone, but it is hard to know if you're getting enough. A healthy diet is always good for you and



## Are you planning a baby? Plan a visit with your doctor!

At this visit, you can discuss any health concerns you have and ask for advice on all the steps listed here! Also tell your doctor if you are being treated by other types of doctors, including for mental health.



your baby though. Some foods with folate are leafy green vegetables, kidney beans, orange juice and other citrus fruits, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, peas, lentils, and whole-grain products. Folic acid is also added to some foods like enriched breads, pastas, rice, and cereals.

- Start watching what you eat. Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains (such as whole-wheat breads or crackers). Eat plenty of calcium-rich foods (such as nonfat or low-fat yogurt, milk, and broccoli) that your baby needs for strong

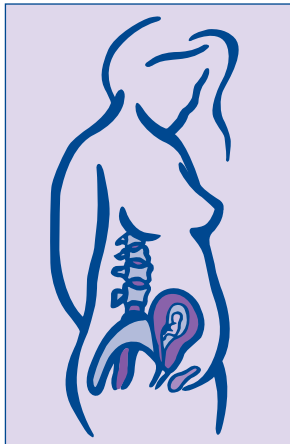


bones and teeth. If you live in areas where fruits and vegetables aren't in season, frozen vegetables are a good option. Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods (such as butter and fatty meats). Choose leaner foods when you can (such as nonfat or low-fat yogurt or milk, chicken and turkey without the skin, and fish).

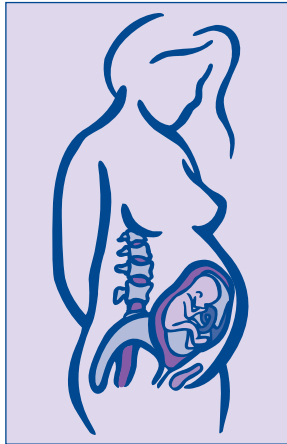
- Tell your doctor if you smoke or use alcohol or drugs. Quitting is hard, but you can do it. Ask your doctor for help.
- Get enough sleep (try to get seven to nine hours every night).
- If you can, control the stress in your life. When it comes to things like work and family, figure out what you can really do. Set limits with yourself and others. Don't be afraid to say NO to requests for your time and energy.
- Move your body. Once you get pregnant, you cannot increase your exercise routine by much. So it's best to start before the baby is on the way.
- Get any health problems under control. Talk to your doctor about how your health problems might affect you and your baby while pregnant. If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels. If you have high blood pressure, monitor these levels as well. If you are overweight, talk to your doctor about what a healthy weight is for you. There are things both you and your doctor can do to help you have a safe pregnancy and healthy baby.

### Stages of Pregnancy

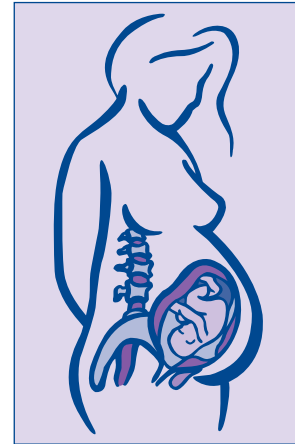
Pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks, counting from the first day of your last menstrual period. The weeks are grouped into three “trimesters.” Your doctor will refer to your pregnancy by the age of your baby in weeks.



**First Trimester:**  
0-12 weeks



**Second Trimester:**  
13-27 weeks



**Third Trimester:**  
28 weeks until birth

- Ask your mother, aunts, grandmother, and sisters about their pregnancies. Did they have morning sickness? Problems with labor? How did they cope with them?
- Find out what health problems run in your family. Tell these to your doctor. You can get tested before getting pregnant for some health problems that run in families (genetic testing).
- Make sure you have had all of your immunizations (shots), especially for rubella (German measles). If you haven't had chickenpox or rubella, get the shots at least three months before getting pregnant.
- Get checked for hepatitis (hep-uh-tie-tus) B and C, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and HIV because these can harm both you and your baby. Tell your doctor if you or your sex partners have ever had an STD or HIV.
- Go over all of the medicines you take (prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines you buy without prescriptions, and herbals) with your doctor and ask if they are safe to take while you are trying to get pregnant or are pregnant.

## During Pregnancy

If you know you are pregnant, or think you might be, call your doctor as soon as possible and set up a visit. You will need to visit your doctor many times during your pregnancy. Follow your doctor's schedule for visits and don't miss them!

You will notice your body is changing in many ways. These changes may be strange at first, but they are all normal. Try to stay as healthy as you can—for you *and* your new baby! You can take these actions:

### Ask your partner to stay healthy too!

Ask your partner to limit how much alcohol is consumed. If your partner uses illegal drugs or smokes, encourage quitting. Studies show that men who drink a lot, smoke, or use drugs can have problems with their sperm. These might cause you to have problems getting pregnant.

- Stop smoking, drinking alcohol, and doing drugs! These can cause long-term damage to your baby. Ask your doctor for help. You also can talk with someone you can trust such as member of your faith community, a counselor, or a friend.
- Keep eating a healthy diet. This includes lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods. You need 1000 milligrams (mg) of calcium per day. If you are 18 or younger, you need 1300 mg of calcium each day. Your body is giving a lot of its calcium to your baby's growing bones. Drinking at least eight glasses of water a day can help keep you and your baby healthy. Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods such as butter, fatty meats, mayonnaise, and high-fat snack foods. Choose foods lower in fat such as fat-free or low-fat milk and yogurt, chicken and turkey without the skin, and fish.
- Don't eat uncooked or undercooked meats or fish. These can make you sick.

### Foods with Calcium

Here are some foods to help you get the calcium you need. Check the food label for more information.

| Food                      | Portion    | Calcium (milligrams) |
|---------------------------|------------|----------------------|
| Plain, nonfat yogurt      | 1 cup      | 450                  |
| Grilled cheese sandwich   | 1 sandwich | 371                  |
| American cheese           | 2 ounces   | 348                  |
| Ricotta cheese, part skim | 1/2 cup    | 337                  |
| Fruit yogurt              | 1 cup      | 315                  |

### Limit your fish!

Some fish have mercury, which, in high doses, can hurt your baby's growing brain and nervous system. There are some fish you should NOT eat if you are pregnant. **Here are some guidelines:**

1. Do **not** eat any shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish (also called golden or white snapper) because these fish have high levels of mercury.
2. Many of us enjoy tuna. But, to be safe, don't eat more than six ounces of "white" or "albacore" tuna or tuna steak each week.
3. If you can, buy "light" tuna. But don't eat more than 12 ounces of light tuna or other cooked fish each week. Other fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, salmon, pollock, and catfish.

- Limit caffeine from coffee, tea, sodas, medicines, and chocolates.
- Take at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily to help prevent certain types of birth defects. Your doctor may prescribe a daily vitamin that has it, or you can buy folic acid pills at the drug store or grocery store. Keep eating foods high in folic acid like orange juice, other citrus fruits and juices, leafy green vegetables, beans, peanuts, peas, and whole-grain products.

- Go over all of the medicines you take (prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines you buy without prescriptions, and herbals) with your doctor and ask if they are safe to take while you are pregnant. Most of the time, the medicine a pregnant woman is taking does not affect her baby. But sometimes it can, causing damage or birth defects. Talk with your doctor about which drugs are safe.
- Stay active. Being physically active during pregnancy helps you in many ways. It prevents a lot of extra weight gain. It helps you have good posture, which will help you feel better later in your pregnancy. It can help you sleep better and have a shorter, easier labor. If you were physically active before getting



**You have choices! Different types of professionals can help you have your baby.**

- **OB or OB/GYN (obstetrician/gynecologist)** — a medical doctor who is an expert in prenatal care, labor, and in delivering babies in a hospital.
- **Certified nurse-midwife (CNM)** — an expert in prenatal care, labor and delivery. CNMs can deliver your baby at the hospital, in a birth center, or at home. There are other types of midwives as well.
- **Doula** — an expert support person who helps give physical support during labor and birth, such as advice on how to breathe, relax, move, and position yourself. She also gives emotional support and comfort. Doulas and midwives often work together during a woman's labor.

pregnant, you can keep doing mild-to-moderate activity, like low-impact aerobic dance, swimming, or walking.

- If you were not physically active before getting pregnant, you still can become active, but start slowly. Try walking at first, then build up to more. Mild stretching and weight training on exercise machines are ok. Talk to your doctor about which activities are good for you.
- Avoid toxic chemicals like paint, paint thinners, cleaning products, and those

used to kill bugs or that contain lead or mercury. Read the product label to see if it has a pregnancy warning.

- Avoid hot tubs, saunas, and x-rays.
- Avoid changing cat litter. It can carry and cause an infection that can cause birth defects. Wear gloves when gardening in areas cats may visit.
- Get enough sleep (try to get seven to nine hours every night).
- If you can, control the stress in your life. Remember, this is **YOUR** time. Don't be afraid to say **NO** to requests for your time and energy.
- Learn all you can. Read books, watch videos, go to a childbirth class, and talk with other moms.

### After Your Baby Is Born

After your baby is born, you really need to keep doing all you can to stay strong and healthy. It takes a lot of energy to care for your precious new child!







- Be patient with yourself! You're going to do a great job!
- Rest as much as you can. One way is to sleep when your baby sleeps. Spend time getting to know your baby. Let others help you with chores, and don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Try drinking eight glasses of water a day to help you recover from labor and to relieve constipation (when it's hard to make a bowel movement).
- Keep eating plenty of calcium-rich foods (such as fat-free or low-fat milk and

yogurt, low-fat cheese, and broccoli). You still need 1000 mg of calcium per day for strong, healthy bones.

- Try to keep taking your daily vitamin. These extra vitamins can keep your body strong. Breastfeeding moms need 500 micrograms of folic acid daily.
- Get support. Talk to family members, other new moms, and friends about what you are going through. Share stories about your baby.
- Talk with your doctor about the kinds of activities you can do after giving birth.
- Ask your doctor about birth control. You can get pregnant at this time, even if you haven't had a period since giving birth, and you are breastfeeding.



### Then and Now

Before 1991 we didn't know that taking folic acid before getting pregnant and in the first three months of pregnancy helps prevent certain kinds of birth defects. Now we know that getting 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid daily in a vitamin or in a folic acid pill is best for ALL women who

might get pregnant. And it helps to eat a healthy diet that has lots of fruits and vegetables and foods that have folic acid added to them (like some breakfast cereals). Try orange juice, leafy green vegetables, kidney beans, peanuts, peas, lentils, and broccoli.

- See your doctor four to six weeks after the birth. **Call right away if you have:**
  - very heavy vaginal bleeding (more than a heavy period)
  - a fever of 101° or higher
  - severe pain in your lower stomach
  - severe headaches or problems seeing that do not go away
  - frequent or burning urination, or
  - if you feel very sad

### **Breast milk is one of the best gifts *only you* can give your baby!**

#### Why breastfeed?

- Breast milk is free, clean and saves you time.
- If you breastfeed for at least six months, your baby won't be sick as often.
- Breast milk has the perfect amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help your baby grow just right.
- Most babies find breast milk easier to digest than formula.

Give your baby breast milk only—no formula—for the first six months of life. It is even better for your baby to breastfeed for 12 months or longer. You can also give solid foods when your baby is six months old, while you keep breastfeeding.

Be patient with yourself! What works for one mom might not work for you. Relax and try to find a routine and positions that work for you and your baby. It will get easier with time.

If you are having a hard time, don't give up! There are specially trained people you

can turn to for help. Call the **National Breastfeeding Helpline** at 800-994-9662! It's free! Or visit [www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding](http://www.4woman.gov/breastfeeding).

